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Los Angeles Latinx Ska: Subaltern Rhythms, Co-optation of Sound, and New Cultural Visions from a Transnational Latin America

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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by

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The thesis of Denny Alvarez is approved.

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This thesis is dedicated to the ghetto Ska kids of Los Angeles California.

ABSTRACT

Los Angeles Latinx Ska: Subaltern Rhythms, Co-optation of Sound, and New Cultural Visions from a Transnational Latin America

By Denny Alvarez

Ska is a Caribbean born musical genre that was originally created from oppressive conditions and from where Caribbean slaves had used music to preserve African culture during colonial times. Such a context gave way to the emergence of a Rastafarian culture that created Ska, and even though it is a music of past times, it is now adopted, transformed, and rearticulated by Latinxs in Los Angeles into new conditions and into new dialogues. By drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theories of common sense and subalternity, I advance that through the musical realm the racially oppressed create spaces of solidarity where they identify collective antagonisms and articulate inherited social symptoms. The racially oppressed organize spaces that push away from the antagonisms of social life and dance to rhythms that have historically developed in relation to structures of power. While not all songs express a relation to structures of power, the dialogical process that takes place in the Latinx Ska space is articulated from a community that has a history of inequality, displacement, and a policed existence; it is the cultural perspective of the historically oppressed. This thesis explores Los Angeles Latinx Ska as a cultural formation that articulates contemporary contradictions through a rhythmic common sense that in turn creates the avenues to articulate and struggle for hegemony.

Keywords: hegemony, conglomerate of sounds, structures of power, global city, subalternity, common sense, co-optation, contradictory consciousness

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, Ska music in Los Angeles is articulated in a densely Latinx populated region where live performances are organized by the children of the Latin American diaspora. In other words, it expresses the perspective of new generations of Latinx youth whose parents have immigrated from all around Latin America. While African Americans and -to a much lesser extent- White people can also be seen in the Ska musical spaces of Los Angeles, it is overwhelmingly Latinx youth who can be found organizing, performing, dancing, and singing to the Ska rhythm.

Live musical performances in the neighborhoods of South Central -which is the basis of my fieldwork- can take place on dirt floors and on concrete floors. In these spaces, large gatherings of people get together as they wait for Ska bands to transform the setting into a rhythmic space. This musical space resembles a house party with people conversing amongst friends, and while some stand around waiting for the next band to play, others walk around finding and greeting acquaintances.[1] I would also walk around in between sets to meet and greet people during my fieldwork, often recognizing people from previous events.[2] It is also interesting to note that in between sets there is sometimes background music coming from a speaker. The music can vary between Latin American popular songs, to contemporary Rap/Hip-hop radio hits, to different popular Rock songs of past times. While the playing of background music in between performances is not always the case, it is important to

[1] As Angel of *Third Eye Productions* mentioned, "I feel like the fact that we're keeping it smaller or even like you could say local, it allows us to get personal."

[2] In memorial weekend 2018 at an event in South Central I saw a person that I had met before who plays in the band *Brava*. Even though I had introduced myself a couple of times throughout the previous months, he asked if I had come to one of these events before. I responded "yes at least once a month," and to which he responded "oh, you're one of those." "Yes" I replied, "I can't always come but I keep coming back." This short but valuable interaction allowed me to understand that most people generally know each other at these events. Tony also clarified this when I touched base with him in the summer of 2018 where he mentioned that it's usually a "handful" of people who keep coming back.

acknowledge that the Ska musical space exists in relation to a *conglomerate of sounds* whose origins spread across time and space.[3]

The Ska rhythmic form regularly changes tempo from the fast paced Ska rhythm, down to a slowed paced Reggae sound, and the change in tempo often opens its fluctuation into different genres. It is interesting to contemplate on Maureen Mahon's article *Music, Power, and Practice* where she writes that "recording industry and marketing experts and professional music critics define music genres and assign artists to the categories they deem appropriate…" and that a genre ultimately "shapes the ways in which an artist is marketed to audiences as well as the creative parameters within which an artist is expected to work" (Mahon, 328). Here Mahon hints at the fluidity of organic music since it is often when music intersects with structures of power that it is molded to fit a marketable genre. As Angel, a Ska show organizer -who was originally born in Distrito Federal, Mexico- explains, "it's not just Ska, its Ska-Punk, Ska-Reggae and... when it comes to that… even one band alone could go ahead and play a super chill song. Or you're dancing with a female and like the next minute they play a really cool Hardcore song.. [where people start] pushing and shoving." This can happen from one song to the next or even within a song since the slower version of the Ska rhythm can transform into the slow paced Cumbia or Reggae rhythm, while the faster paced Ska rhythmic formation can evolve into the Punk or Hardcore rhythm.[4] The Ska rhythm is hence easily adaptable to different musical formations and can often sound like

[3] "According to the theory of *time-space compression*, the rapid innovation of communication and transportation technologies has transformed the way we think about space(distance) and time" (Guest, 20).
[4] The prevalence of a Hardcore rhythm is the reason why Los Angeles Ska is often referred to as *Skacore*. The song *Skamba* by *23 Skunks* is a perfect example of the fluidity of Los Angeles Ska. This song is a fusion between the *Skacore* sound and Latin American rhythms. The song *Skumbia* by *La Muerte* is also an example of this fusion. Songs mentioned in this thesis can be found on the music website *Soundcloud* or as a *YouTube* video.

other genres if the listener is not attuned to the Ska rhythm.[5] This opens the avenues for various popular musical rhythms -as well as popular songs of past times- to be adopted and modified to fit the Ska rhythmic sound. Through this musical fusion different versions of what Ska can be, are created, and the Ska musical space becomes a laboratory of rhythmic experimentation.

Gaye Theresa Johnson writes in *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity* that "dance halls, night clubs, and youth centers could be transformed into laboratories for the creation of new identities and identifications" (Johnson, xii) and just the same, the Ska musical space -as a center where youth congregate-, is a laboratory that not only experiments and creates new musical fusions, but that also creates a fusion of new identity formations. The Ska space is hence a musical realm where new generations of Latinx youth create an experience that attempts to transcend the antagonisms[6] of life, and where Latinxs also express a creative imagination that exists in relation to their lived experience.

II. MUSIC AND SOCIETY

Matthew Gelbart writes in his article *The Language of Nature* that during the Enlightenment era many writers[7] suggested that music emerged from the original cries of humans, and that these writers "... painted these original cries themselves as a proto-language largely instinctive and natural to humans: song. In other words, [that] human musical instinct was itself the origin of language." Gelbart goes on to write that in the middle ages, music was perceived to be larger than humanity and part of the "divine proportions of the Universe"

[5] I realized this during the Q&A part of my Master's research presentation in the *First Latin American and Iberian Studies Graduate Student Conference* titled *Violence, Memory, and History* at the University of California Santa Barbara.

[6] Negative aspects.

[7] "Formulations along these lines came in Etienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*… and Lord Monboddo's treatise *On the Origin and Progress of Language*… but most influentially in Herder's 1772 prize essay *On the Origin of Language*… and especially in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous *Essay on the Origin of Languages*" (Gelbart, 365).

(Gelbart, 365). By reflecting on past perceptions Gelbart reminds us that music has often been understood to have arisen from the innermost essence of the human spirit; as an instinctive expression that transcends the human ability to translate feelings into words and hence being intimately related to a larger cosmic truth.[8] By channeling thought into song, organic expressions bring forth the inner most contradictory truths of a lived experience.

Harris M. Berger argues that "we would be mechanistic and dogmatic in our interpretations if we read all forms of music as nothing more than a distraction from underlying power relations or a ventilation of social tensions" (Berger, 317). In the case of a racially oppressed population, these expressions often become a force that feels and critiques structures of power. Music exists in a social world with complex layers of domination and subordination; and the tension that exists between the oppressors and the oppressed ultimately affects the thoughts, essence, and lived experience of the people that channel thought into song. It is within this conceptual framework that I argue that the words said in song that challenge dominant *hegemony*[9] also have the potential to change social relations.[10] While there can be a long path "from the articulation to the action,"[11] this thesis merely suggest sites of potential where critical thought in musical expressions invites the possibility

[8] Timothy Rice also writes in *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction* that "humans seem to believe nearly everywhere that singing, over and above ordinary speech, is necessary to communicate with gods, ancestors and spirits… [and that] music is often the means used to contact the supernatural world and a sign in the natural world that such contact has occurred" (Rice, 47).

[9] Google search defines hegemony as "leadership or dominance, especially by one country or social group over others." In this thesis hegemony will be used in its Gramscian form, as the dominant ideology in society.

[10] For example, Maureen Mahon writes in *Music, Power, and Practice* that the expression of culture can change power relations, but also goes on to mention the dialectic between audiences, their identities, their beliefs, and how they encourage action through music and dance. She writes that it is essential to "take seriously the relationship between expressive culture and other facets of social life, and to consider the ways artists and audiences use forms like dance… and of course, music, to express their identities and beliefs, to advance critiques, to evoke emotions, and to encourage actions" (Mahon, 327).

[11] Or "from the wish to the deed," as suggested by Professor George Lipsitz.

of action and hence also inviting the possibility of being integrated into larger processes of social transformation.

Key informant interviews and fieldwork ultimately allowed me to analyze how new generations of Latinxs create and express Ska in Los Angeles, how musical culture helps to navigate new cultural visions, and how it allows an authentic hegemony from below to be struggled for. It is just as important to acknowledge that even though Ska allows Latinx youth to organize sonic spaces of solidarity, the *global city*[12] of Los Angeles also provides avenues of assimilation into a dominant culture that maintains the power of an elite few.[13][14] Los Angeles Latinx Ska is ultimately a space from which to analyze the contradictions that

[12] Saskia Sassen conceptualizes the global city as part of, and connected to, different global network circuit points; circuit points that are imperative to the functionality of global capitalism. Sassen writes that there are "networks that connect cities across borders and can increasingly bypass national states. This holds especially for global cities, of which there are about forty in the world" (Sassen, 13).

[13] By dominant culture I am mainly referring to Neoliberal ideologies that have become common sense in contemporary society. The implementation of neoliberalism around the world in the 1970s happened in a moment that the capitalist system was in crisis and had to transform and expand in new ways. Yet the implementation of a hegemony that benefits an elite few, at the cost of the majority, and that civil society internalizes is in essence a contradictory ideology that is not entirely coherent. In his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey writes on how ideals of freedom were redirected by structures of power towards the liberties of consumer choice and individual libertarianism. He writes that neoliberalism

> "has to be backed up by a practical strategy that emphasized the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices. Neoliberalization requires both politically and economically the creation of a neoliberal market based popular culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism" (Harvey, 42).

The problem with libertarianism is that while it promotes ideas of freedom, it is an ideological distortion that also promotes the freedom of the market and hence, reinforces the financialization of everything. The distortion of natural feelings of freedom along with the promotion of individual freedoms ultimately translated to freedom for the elites to expand and restore their power.

[14] Harvey elaborates in regards to the spread of Neoliberalism around the world and writes that

> "An open project around the restoration of economic power to a small elite would probably not gain much popular support. But a programmatic attempt to advance the cause of individual freedoms could appeal to a mass base and so disguise the drive to restore class power. Furthermore, once the state apparatus made the neoliberal turn it could use its power of persuasion, co-optation, bribery, and threat to maintain the climate of consent necessary to perpetuate its power" (Harvey, 40).

Elites struggled for hegemony by using bribery and co-optation to promote neoliberalism as the hegemonic world order. The co-optation of popular rhythms is part of a global neoliberal project since in contemporary times, the most widely distributed popular music often perpetuates an individualism that negates social solidarity.

arise for the children of the Latin American diaspora as the *struggle for hegemony*[15] takes place in a musical, ideological, and political terrain.[16]

Analyzing the social political history of this musical expression will help to understand the context in which new generations of Latinxs in Los Angeles exercise an organizational agency that reinvents Latinx culture. For these reasons I argue throughout this thesis that to contextualize musical formations is to analyze the social political history of a moment because musical expressions embody an insight of the deeper underlying tensions of society and its ideological responses.

III. FIELDWORK AND METHODS

My fieldwork began in the summer of 2017[17] where I attended the annual free Ska show that is held at Macarthur Park every summer. I arrived when *La Resistencia* -a band from Los Angeles/South Gate/Lynwood California- was about to perform. I scouted around the area, and it was -as usual- mostly Latinx youth but there were also people of all ages since it was held at a park where parents and children could be seen.

La Resistencia began to play but their singers were from *Libertadores* which is a local Ska band from South East Los Angeles. The artist known as *Profesor Galactico* also joined later on in the set. In between songs, the singers from *Libertadores* mentioned the corrupt government as well as the president, a name who they said they did not even want to mention. When the performance ended I began walking around to see if I could find any

[15] Here I am referencing George Lipsitz article *The Struggle for Hegemony* where hegemony is portrayed as something that is politically and ideologically struggled *for* "in which aggrieved populations seek to undermine the legitimacy of dominant ideology." More on this in the concluding section of this thesis.

[16] Maureen Mahon proposed these essential questions: "Who has creative and economic control?.. When and where do artists resist dominant expectations?" It is crucial to consider these questions as they pertain to musical expressions because the musical realm is not exempt from a capitalist system that permeates into all aspects of social life, and where popular rhythms are often co-opted, heavily distributed, and revised by structures of wealth and power who in turn facilitate the articulation of dominant ideologies as common sense. The concept of co-optation will be further explored in the latter parts of this thesis.

[17] I also reconnected with half of the interviewees throughout the summer of 2018.

band members or somebody to talk to and found both singers from *Libertadores* behind the stage. I spoke to one and he told me about his upcoming shows. As I left the free concert, I saw young Latinxs everywhere, and even a guy sitting on the floor that was having a hard time in his drunkenness. His friends surrounded him, close to a puddle of his vomit. They joked at his state but also tried to talk sense to him.

On another weekend I went to the backyard Ska show that I found out about through my conversation with the *Libertadores* singer. It was a benefit show for one of the band members from the band *The 5th Wave* who are from the San Fernando Valley. The show took place in a backyard in South Central close to Inglewood, around 57th St. There were a lot of people and I could barely move around. There were also people up on top of the roof of the houses, enjoying the show and sometimes taking videos or pictures. I am not sure what band was playing when I arrived since I was originally there for *Libertadores* who were going to perform last.[18]

When the band *The 5th Wave* came out, the singer began to thank everyone for coming and mentioned that the benefit show was for his father who had recently passed away. He mentioned that today, -that day- was his father's birthday, but that he had died the previous week. He also mentioned that when he told his father that he had joined the band many years ago, he showed him their song called "Schizophrenic," and that his father "was like, that's pretty tight;" the band then began their performance by playing the song. Political messages were also eventually brought up in their set. For example, in the chorus of a song they began to chant "*Pinche gobierno!*" (Fucken government!) and "*Está pendejo el*

[18] My first strategy of my second day of fieldwork was that I was going to try and touch base with the singer from *Libertadores* but it did not end up happening.

gobierno!" (The government is stupid!), as well as other combinations that were directed at the president.[19]

After they finished their set they informed the crowd that *Libertadores* were not able to make it which meant that the live Ska performances had come to an end. A small portion of the crowd quickly dispersed but before long, *Cumbia* music began to play on the speaker system and some began to dance to the classics of *Sonora Dinamita*. At this moment I decided that from now on my fieldwork would take place in the backyards of South Central Los Angeles California; a densely Latinx populated region.

Even though Ska performances can also be found in venues throughout Southern California,[20] fieldwork only took place in the backyards of South Central Los Angeles where I met six people who organize *non-venue*[21] shows throughout the Greater Los Angeles area. While some of the interviewees spoke about venues as something to aspire to, others expressed the need of non-venue spaces as a contrast to venues because of the opportunity that is provided for new bands that may not even have recorded their songs, and because it creates a space for people who cannot go to a venue.[22] I met most of the organizers that I interviewed at different backyard shows in South Central throughout the summer of 2017.[23]

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[19] Upon revisiting the song -which turned out to be called *Pinche Gobierno*-, the spoken content of the song begins with the words "*El pinche gobierno le quiere quitar… su casa a su familia nada le quiere dejar, el es inmigrante no le quiere dar, la misma chansa que el tuvo se la quieren quitar… es tiempo que peleemos, hay que pelear por libertad*" (The fucking government wants to take away, his house and leave nothing to his family, he's an immigrant and they don't want to give him, they want to take away the same chance that he had… it's time to fight, we should fight for liberty). Although the artist never specified whether this song is based on a personal experience, it is important to acknowledge the depth of contemplation that is portrayed; these are expressions that reflect the thoughts of many Latinxs who face similar struggles.

[20] A lot of Ska venue performances happen in the Orange County area.

[21] The term *non-venue* will be used throughout this thesis to encompass all the spaces that these events take place such as backyards, parking lots, and warehouses.

[22] Professor George Lipsitz adds to this argument -in a revision of this thesis- that this "is especially important in a Neoliberal era when 'venues' are expensive and geared toward high end consumers, investors, and owners, when new groups not only don't get paid for gigs but sometimes have to pay to play."

[23] Except for Kevin from *Third Eye Productions* who was later introduced to me by the other two *Third Eye Productions* organizers -Misa and Angel- whom I met at a Ska event in South Central Los Angeles.

I interviewed an organizer from South Central (*SoCal Syndicate*), one from North Hollywood (*SoCal Syndicate*), one from Victorville (*Emphatic Entertainment*), and three from the San Fernando Valley (*Third Eye Productions*). All of them organize shows under their *production*[24] names and each production ranged between one to three people. I decided that I would not seek interviews in venues because non-venue shows are often less expensive and are hence more open to new generations of Latinxs that may not have access to a venue because of age, distance, or monetary restrictions.[25] The locality of staying within South Central Los Angeles also ensured the possibility that I would mostly come across Latinx musical expressions.[26]

IV. ETHNOGRAPHY OF LATINX SKA YOUTH CULTURE

Tony, a 21 year old musician who was born in Inglewood and raised in Compton -of Salvadoran and Guatemalan background-, mentioned that he helps the *SoCal Syndicate*[27] production.[28] He spoke about the limitations of playing in a venue and mentioned that "with a venue, you can only focus on certain amount of crowds like 18 and over." Tony's experience in performing in both *Banda* and in Ska bands provides a greater conceptualization of who these spaces are organized for. He compared the two forms of performance and mentioned that there is

> "more of the money flow into the Banda scene [than] towards the Ska scene. In the Ska scene you have a younger crowd, we have younger kids, people that have lesser jobs… the younger crowds… that's always going to be

[24] Production names can be seen displayed at their events. The productions mentioned in this thesis are *Emphatic Entertainment* (Inland Empire/Victorville), *SoCal Syndicate* (North Hollywood/Los Angeles), *Third Eye Productions* (San Fernando Valley), and *Evoekore Media* (Los Angeles).

[25] While live Ska performances in people's homes cost between one to six dollars, venues usually cost between twelve to thirty dollars; give or take.

[26] Doing fieldwork in venues and in regions outside of the Greater Los Angeles area would also need to be a much larger empirical study that would extend beyond the confines of a Master's thesis.

[27] This production mainly organizes events in South Central but also throughout Los Angeles.

[28] He also plays for the bands *The Midcarters*, *Brava*, and *Mano Sucia.* By the ending stages of writing this thesis in late 2018 he had also joined the Ska bands *Libertadores*, *La Pobreska*, and *The Ironies*.

> underneath, like pov.. not underneath poverty. But [when] you compare to like older adults like with the Banda scene… these are [Banda] people that are willing to put in money and all this just so they can have a good time…"

From my fieldwork I noticed that people in the backyards of South Central were mostly -although not always- in between their teenage years to their early twenties which makes it an important space when analyzing the culmination of a developing Latinx society and also when considering that to be young is to exist in a moment where people are awakening/transitioning from childhood, learning to interpret the world in more profound ways, and a moment where people are building a framework to understand the world as they come to maturity. This also means that when Tony mentioned "people that have lesser jobs," he was referring to the youth that have just recently started working.[29] Tony also went on to say that the Banda scene is "about being Mexican, having a job and being able to throw these big parties," which serves to highlight a contrast between the reinforcement of Mexican identity in Los Angeles[30] and a new formation of Latinx youth cultural identity.

In a *SoCal Syndicate* event in South Central Los Angeles I also met two of the organizers of *Third Eye Productions (818)* -Misa and Angel- who are from the San Fernando Valley. It is common to see organizers from other productions that are based on the outskirts of Los Angeles since Ska musical spaces often gravitate towards the central Los Angeles region.[31] An interview was then set up for a later date in Burbank CA where all three *Third*

[29] One can argue that it is mainly a space for youth because as people get older they can opt to go to dancing clubs or venues.

[30] In *Footsteps in the Dark* George Lipsitz writes in regards to the birth of Banda that it "made significant inroads among young listeners who had previously preferred top forty rock music or hip hop" (Lipsitz, 67). Lipsitz goes on to write that "when people of Mexican ancestry in Los Angeles started to listen and dance to Banda music in large numbers, they deployed shared memories of their former home to help themselves feel at home in a country that has historically wanted their labor but largely despised them and their culture" (Lipsitz, 69).

[31] Ska musical spaces also take place in the OC and Riverside region, but those are mostly held in venues. Jonny of *Socal Syndicate* clarified that non-venue Ska shows in Orange County barely exist because they get stopped by the police "by 10:00pm."

Eye Productions (818) organizers -Misa, Angel, and Kevin- arrived. Kevin -who is from a Salvadoran and Cuban background- elaborated on the youthful demographic of backyard shows. He mentioned that he believes that the age range is generally between 15 to 35 years old and continued by saying that there might be some discontent from people because of the underage crowd, but also countered it by saying that if the underage populations do not have this space, "they are still gonna do what they're gonna do on a Saturday night but somewhere else… at a park, at a party…"

In another interview, an organizer -who was originally born in Leon Guanajuato Mexico, - from the production called *Emphatic Entertainment,*[32] also described the Ska space as "somewhere safe to be… instead of roaming out in the streets…" He also mentioned that people have told him that they "go to shows to avoid being at home because they have issues at home or [that] they don't even have a home…" This example portrays the non-venue Ska space as a unique congregation of youth and as a space that is available for a developing Latinx society in the Greater Los Angeles area.

The *Emphatic Entertainment* organizer also went on to say, "like I work, you know, every day. But when I throw a show, when I go to a show, I forget about work and I'm just there enjoying my time and you know, it's just kinda like… [a] one night vacation…" By mentioning Ska events as a one night vacation, the *Emphatic Entertainment* organizer alludes to the feelings of isolation that are often brought by the *alienation* of labor[3334] in

[32] This organizer mentioned that he drives to Los Angeles from Victorville to help organize these events. He also mentioned that he often collaborates with *SoCal Syndicate.*

[33] The alienation comes from the lack of creative exercise since creativity is often sought outside of the work place in a capitalist society; a creativity which is crucial for human development and which Karl Marx explains in much detail in his book *Capital*. Marx writes that with alienated labor, "the worker always leaves the process in the same state as he entered it - a personal source of wealth, but deprived of any means of making that wealth a reality for himself. Since, before he enters the process, his own labour has already been alienated from him, appropriated by the capitalist, and incorporated with capital, it now, in the course of the process, constantly objectifies itself so that it becomes a product alien to him" (Marx, 716).

contemporary jobs. The Ska space in contrast is a realm of freedom and self-expression where expressive culture allows people to "respond to and deal with 'real politics' and 'real issues'" (Mahon, 327) even when the intended purpose is not political. For this reason I argue that the Ska space is an arena where musical expressions provide profound avenues from which to analyze social symptoms and their relation to structures of power.[35]

V. THE DANCING SPACE

During live Ska performances people usually dance in circles known as *pits* which are spaces that are -often congested- in front or around a live band, and where people usually skip, run around, jump, and dance in a rotating circle. When it is a dirt floor, people wear bandanas that cover most of their faces -except for their eyes- to protect them from the clouds of dust that rise when people dance in the pit. Ska pits in particular cater towards a specific form of dancing referred to as *skanking*. When asked about this form of dancing the *Emphatic Entertainment* organizer said,

> "the whole skanking thing, I mean, it started since Ska music started. It was just a whole different type of skanking, you know, before you move your arms around in place and, you know, kind of dance with a partner or whatever. But it kind of like evolved... into a full circle thing... now you move your hands, kind of like, almost like skipping in a circle... but [everybody's] got their own style. Dude, I've seen people that get really down and I'm like… they know how to move to the rhythm, you know, it's just a way of like, just moving to the rhythm and, you know, kind of appreciating the music, feeling the music instead of just standing around."

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[34] In *Capital*, Marx also theorizes on the creative capacity of humanity and contrasts animal creations with the human ability to imagine a greater outcome. He writes for example that "a spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality" (Marx, 284). Here Marx highlights that humanity is unique in that they imagine, critique, and theorize on their engagement with the material world; transforming their conditions through this process. As humans continue this transformative process, the conflict of social forces give rise to new conditions and to new interpretations of such conditions. The importance of human creativity in the history of human development and the relation to a world that humanity continuously transforms, is one where musical expressions provide profound avenues from which to analyze social symptoms.

[35] In *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity* Gaye Theresa Johnson also argues that, "... sounds have shared meanings that are informed by and give inspiration to the social, political, and economic power relations experienced by their producers" (Johnson, 85).

While this skipping/jumping/jittery type of dance is the most prominent at live Ska performances, other forms of dancing can also be seen with Cumbias or Punk fueled musical breakdowns within Ska songs serving as a reminder that Ska has developed in relation to Punk and Latin American rhythms.[36]

After a short conversation where the *Third Eye Productions* organizers talked about how much more popular Ska is when compared to Punk and Metal backyard shows,[37] I asked, "why do you think Ska is what people want?" to which Misa responded,

> "… honestly, the dancing… It's a mixture of both… because [in] those Metal shows, you're going to have people pushing each other and that's the sort of crowd I guess but as a Ska show you have everybody. You have the girls who like dancing, you have the guys who like pitting and getting crazy and you have a mixture of them both, and I honestly think that's what leads to more people wanting to go to the Ska shows compared to the Metal or Punk shows."

Kevin followed up by mentioning the diverse sounds that Ska shows provide and said, "when you think of a *pit* you think of Metal.. [but] Ska is just different, it is a little bit more diverse." Kevin was referring to the fusion of sounds that range between the Punk/Metal/Hardcore style, and the dancing/skanking breakdowns that take place in the Ska pit; breakdowns that come and go as the tempo of the Ska rhythm fluctuates. The danceability of Ska is a crucial element of its popularity and it is also a reminder that Ska derives from *dance hall*[38] culture. For this reason, the following section explores dance hall culture in order to examine how the racially oppressed have struggled for meaningful forms of expression through the organization of dancing spaces in Los Angeles. This brief history

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[36] More on this on the sections titled *Ska in the Caribbean* and *Transnational Developments.*

[37] Ska may not be the most popular type of backyard shows. I was also informed by another interviewee - Tony- when I touched base with him in the summer of 2018 that it would be impossible to compare. He mentioned that even though Ska is popular in the community, other genres create a world of their own.

[38] Dictionary.com defines a dance hall as "a public establishment that, for an admission fee, provides its patrons with music and space for dancing and, sometimes, dancing partners and refreshments."

will serve to later contextualize how the dance hall culture of racially oppressed populations is intimately related to the birth of Ska in Jamaica.

VI. LOS ANGELES OF THE 1940s-1950s: DANCING IN A COMMON FREQUENCY

Anthony Macias, an Associate professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Riverside, writes in his article *Bringing Music to the People* that in the 1940's the Los Angeles Music Bureau claimed that Los Angeles was the only major city in the country that had musical programs for its citizens. Musical programs were made available to the community such as the Philharmonic Orchestra's series of symphony concerts for youth. At the same time, the Latinx and African American community in Los Angeles had already created their own methods to fill the musical void. As Macias writes, "in darkened dance halls, blues clubs, and jook joints, black workers, in spite of occasional fights, reinforced a sense of community and expressed an often socially circumscribed sexuality" (Macias, 205). These urban dance spaces were also central to Latinx working-class culture "as a pleasurable and meaningful 'means to express [a] relation to the world through stylized movement" (Ibid). The government's music programs were an attempt from the state to foster culture through music, but it was not aware[39] that the racially oppressed populations of Los Angeles were already cultivating new musical formations and altering the ethnic landscape.

[39] I found out in my fieldwork that this has changed in contemporary times. During my first day of fieldwork research at Macarthur Park, I went over to the tables where they were selling shirts and albums, and I asked what the funds were for. The lady said that the funds were for the band and whatever they needed. I went on to ask her if she knew the band members and she replied that the guy that hired her was in the band. I went over to another table, the Levitt Pavilion table which is the name of the public stage in Macarthur Park and I asked about their events and whether this show was put on by the city. The young lady shook her head and seemed slightly confused by my question and replied that they are a nonprofit. I then asked if future shows at Levitt Pavilion were of different types of music and she said yes. I then asked her how they knew these Ska bands and I was told that the nonprofit knew the people that organize live Ska performances. This clarified that there has been a much more profound integration of the community's musical formations and with the larger structural attempts to foster culture through music.

The Black and Brown population created a musical context that did not reflect the interpretation of those in power but that was instead an organic expression that integrated different racially oppressed populations into an underground stylized dancing culture. African American disk jockeys in Los Angeles were revealing music -which was eventually crucial to the creation of Ska- that the municipal programs did not provide such as Jazz, Blues, and R&B. All the while, Mexican American fans became allies to the success of local African American artists "as R&B records became the cruising anthems of neighborhood lowriders" (Macias, 207). The fact that dance halls served as an avenue to unite different racial stratas demonstrates that popular music is ultimately the collective expression of emerging cultural fusions.

This dancing cultural formation also began to attract white working class youth which shook the foundation of white supremacist power and consequently prompted different sectors such as the police as well as "church and parent groups" (Macias, 211) to intervene in this racial mixing. The attraction and affiliation of the White population to the dancing spaces of the racially oppressed in the 1940s and 1950s was a historic challenge to white dominance. As Cedric Robinson writes in *Black Marxism*, "in Latin and *North America*, where European populations were statistically dominant, for most Blacks the whites were existentially a distant, fearful, and oppressive presence" (Robinson, 182). This relation is important when considering that despite this, dancing culture allowed civil society to challenge preconceived racial notions.

The dancing scene did not eliminate racial tensions but it did provide a platform for African American music to attract different sectors of civil society, and even though the Los Angeles Music Bureau attempted to implement cultural visions from above, the dancing

parties that were organized by the racially oppressed populations provided a context that was more attractive and that more accurately reflected the musical spirit of people in Los Angeles. Cultural hegemony amongst civil society had taken a position -from a commonly felt *frequency* from below- that city councilmen could not comprehend since they were detached from the lived conditions of the racially oppressed.[40]

Angel of *Third Eye Productions* theorized on the importance of a common frequency when he said that "everyone, when they listen to music, [they're] vibing just sharing the same *frequency*. When we go to these shows, we're all vibing on the same *frequency*." In allusion to Angel's conception of "same frequency," I argue that in contemporary times, the Ska musical fusion in Los Angeles provides a rhythmic space where new generations of Latinxs create a common frequency that in turn also creates the avenues for the organic articulation of *common sense* notions of their lived experience.

In this thesis I will now use Antonio Gramsci's notion of common sense which is "defined as the sense held in common [that] typically grounds consent… [which] is not the same as 'good sense' that can be constructed out of critical engagement with the issues of the day" (Harvey, 39). By drawing on Gramsci's theories of *common sense* and *subalternity*, I advance that through the musical realm the racially oppressed organically articulate inherited social symptoms and create spaces of solidarity where they identify collective antagonisms that are rooted in historic contradictions.

[40] Antonio Gramsci for example, also theorized on the idea of popular taste in order to explore the "relations between dominant and subaltern cultural forms in dynamic terms, as they act upon each other historically" (Gramsci, 344). This means that popular taste arises from the tension that is historically imposed on the popular majority and is therefore an expression of the subordinated population. Cultural formations that are subaltern, that are in subordinated positions, create a popular taste that is ultimately a fusion between different sectors of the subaltern majority.

VII. SUBALTERN COMMON SENSE

In order to explore common sense notions within Latinx Ska, interviewees were asked about what they think that Ska music sings about. The first response from the *Third Eye Productions* organizers was "our lifestyles.. People could relate to it." This first respondent was Misa -whose parents immigrated from Mexico- and who continued by adding that if people ask themselves what the bands sing about, they will say, "...I love my mom... for instance, *La Pobreska* they have this [song called] *Madre Querida*, it's very emotional.. It explains like a mom waiting at home for the kid all night but she's still waiting because that's your kid you know, and you get there [to the show] and you think about [your own] mom because everybody loves their mom you know." Misa alludes to the worries of his own working class mother and correlates it to the collective worries from all the mothers of those who take part in the Ska cultural formation. He presents the song *Madre Querida* as his perception of an accurate representation of a shared lived experience amongst the Latinx Ska community where a common need to create their own culture often exists in relation to the support that a mother provides.

This first response expresses a commonly held perception of love for one's mother, but this articulation is also part of a more complex common sense. The complexity of the Latinx common sense is reinforced through the musical articulation of all the other aspects of a similarly lived experience. For example, songs range from singing about rebellious feelings,[41] romantic love, smoking cannabis, drinking alcohol, dancing in a Ska environment, and their subordinated context. To further this analysis, I argue that we must conceptualize

[41] The lyrics of song *Descarados* by *D-Skarados* perfectly portrays the rebellious youthful energies of Los Angeles Latinx Ska. For example, the song says "*las reglas no me paran pa nada, aunque esten en frente de mi cara"* (rules don't stop me at all, even if they're in front on my face).

the *subaltern common sense* that exists in Los Angeles Latinx Ska in order to make sense of the creative and transformative essence in this rhythmic space.

Kate Crehan for example writes about Antonio Gramsci's notion of common sense and specifically pin points *subaltern* populations which are populations that exist in conditions of *subordination*. She writes that the "*subaltern* common sense is the ultimate source of new political narratives" (Crehan, 62). It is hence important to be attentive to the subaltern perspective because it expresses a common sense that exists within a context of oppression and which is, in essence, a political narrative. Even if a song is not necessarily about a relation to structures of power -such as inequality, revolution, police brutality, resistance etc.- it is nevertheless an assertion of existence, of a shared lived musical reality, and a reality that cannot be separated from a political context.[42]

While it can be argued that by using the term subaltern we reify the power that subdues the population, or that Latinxs of Los Angeles probably do not refer to themselves as subaltern,[43] I use the term subaltern because of the crucial importance in acknowledging the relation between structures of power and subaltern rhythms. Subaltern rhythms exist in relation to dominant forces that influence the ideology of the oppressed through the *co-optation*[44] of the most popular rhythmic fusions. While processes of co-optation take place, Latinx Ska emerges as a musical expression that is not the dominant rhythmic form in society, -from a subaltern context, - and which consequently gives way to the formation of a subaltern commons sense; it is from such conditions that Latinxs in the Greater Los Angeles

[42] Gaye Theresa Johnson also writes that black and brown expressive culture has been historically suppressed and controlled by Los Angeles city officials which means that "actual physical spaces where assertions of dignity and community entitlement [are] articulated become even more significant" (Johnson, 18).
[43] These two arguments were brought to my attention at the previously cited *First Latin American and Iberian Studies Graduate Student Conference* titled *Violence, Memory, and History*.
[44] Dictionary.com defines co opation as a process of assimilation or to "take, or win over into a larger or established group" as well as to "appropriate as one's own." In this thesis it is used in terms of the ability that structures of power have in appropriating the music of the people.

region create the avenues from which to express historic antagonisms, formulate their consciousness, and articulate a creative imagination. Ska must now be contextualized within Caribbean history -since it is the region from which it came- in order to explore how the rhythm itself also arises from oppressive subaltern conditions. This will also set the foundation to later explore the relation that subaltern rhythms have to structures of wealth and power that *co-opt* the sounds of the people.

VIII. SKA IN THE CARIBBEAN

As a Caribbean born music that arose in the late 1950's and early 1960's, Ska was created from a context where Caribbean slaves had previously used music to preserve African culture during colonial times. Dick Hebdige writes in his book *Cut N' Mix* that "one of the less obvious ways in which slaves fought back was through their music. Music was one of the means through which they could express their resentment, anger and frustration. From the time of the maroons the blowing of the *abeng* (cow horn) served as the signal for the slaves to take up arms" (Hebdige, 26). Horns are now a crucial component of the Ska sound but it is interesting that horns also served as a tool of insurrection during colonial times. By creating a sonic space Caribbean slaves pushed away from the antagonistic reality of slave life; they created musical realms where they could momentarily transcend their social problems. This ultimately shows how Ska and Caribbean musical expressions cannot be separated from a history of oppression and its consequent responses of resistance.

It is also important to point out that slaves were allowed to take up their masters' music but they would modify it to make it their own which foreshadows how the black Caribbean population would eventually give way to the emergence of a Rastafarian culture that would experiment with Jazz, Blues, and R&B sounds from the United States to create

Ska. In other words, the black Caribbean population was experimenting with foreign sounds since colonial times and translating them to fit their subalternity. Angel from *Third Eye Productions* also alluded to the remnants of Jazz rhythms within contemporary Ska when he said "I love Jazz and I think that's something that like, I don't want to say like it's attracted me to Ska, but I really enjoy Jazz." Whether consciously or subconsciously, the families of resemblance that Ska has to past rhythms can still be felt in contemporary times.

IX. TRANSNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

After the creation of Ska in the late 1950s and early 1960s, an economic recession eventually gave way to the migration of people from the West Indies to the United Kingdom which allowed Ska to continue to exist amongst the marginalized communities in new lands. Ska transformed along with musical formations in the United Kingdom and eventually became more accessible to the popular public with the emergence of Two-Tone Ska. This development further facilitated the evolution of Ska as a transnational musical exchange of ideas.

According to scholars, the birth of Ska in Jamaica is referred to as the first wave of Ska, and the Ska formation that happened in the United Kingdom through Jamaican migration -which developed in relation to musical formations in the UK such as Punk- is referred to the second wave of Ska of the 1970s. The third wave of Ska began in the United States as an intellectual pursuit by college-based bands. Daniel S. Traber writes in his article *Pick it up! Pick it up!: The Transnational Localism of Ska* that "United States Ska [survived] through the eighties, but hardly anyone knew it was around. In the early nineties, the media universe was dominated by the darker mood of grunge rock" (Traber, 10). Ska eventually - but briefly- achieved mainstream success with bands like No Doubt (Anaheim, California)

and Sublime (Long Beach, California) in the mid-90s, yet Ska mostly stayed underground with California having the highest per capita rate of Ska bands (Traber, 11).

The adoption of this transnationally developed genre by the children of the Latin American diaspora in contemporary times is ultimately a reminder that navigating meaning and identity in the 21st century can entail a transnational hybridity where expressive popular culture is summoned from past and current musical formations from around the world.

X. SUBALTERNITY AS A CONTESTED TERRAIN

While Ska is popular amongst Latinxs in the Greater Los Angeles area, it is crucial to acknowledge that popular music and the subaltern perspective are a contested terrain. As previously mentioned, there is sometimes background music being played in between live Ska performances which shows that Ska does not exist in isolation since Latinxs in Los Angeles often have a relation to a conglomerate of sounds. By considering that the discourse being articulated to different musical formations will vary, these conglomerates of sound can be conceptualized as different contributions to how a person's ideology can oscillate "between poles of 'authenticity' and 'assimilation'" (Perez-Torres, 210) to dominant culture.

Angel of *Third Eye Productions* expressed his relation to a conglomerate of sounds when he was asked about what music he listens to. He said, "I honestly could say I like everything from Country, to *Trap*, to everything. Even *the new things* I had trouble at first adjusting to it and liking it, but the more I listened to it, the more I could vibe out to it, the more I enjoy it." By mentioning "*the new things*" Angel was referring to new heavily distributed[45] rhythms, and the sounds that are disproportionately emphasized as the music of the moment must be brought into this analysis in order to better understand subalternity as a

[45] Here I am confidently making this assumption because we were talking about the *Trap* genre which we collectively agreed is the most popularized form of Rap and most popular musical genre at the time of the interview.

contested terrain. In other words, it is essential to acknowledge the relation subaltern musical formations have to dominant musical formations.

It is now also important to re-emphasize that Ska was born from a Rastafarian experimentation with United States' sounds and elaborate on this by bringing attention to the fact that Ska "erupted from the working-class shantytowns of Kingston as a vital, dynamic *cultural reaction* to the control of American popular music by a handful of corporations in the 1950s and 1960s" (Heathcott, 191). The experimentation with United States' sounds was possible because Jamaican Disk Jockeys would travel to the United States to buy Jazz, Blues, and R&B albums to play in Jamaican dance hall parties. The fact that United States' subaltern music was eventually *co-opted* by the music industry and remodified to appeal to a wider audience is what ultimately prompted Rastafarians to experiment with previous American sounds since the new records no longer reflected the subalternity that the Jamaican population yearned for. The co-optation of sound is hence a crucial concept that better allows us to conceptualize the musical realm as an arena where "the cultural domination by metropolitan elites eviscerates and obliterates traditional cultures rooted in centuries of shared experience" (Lipsitz, 158). Organic musical expressions within the Latinx community cannot possibly be understood without also conceptualizing the musical avenues of assimilation into a dominant culture.

At the beginning of the year of 2018 for example, *Business Insider* published an article titled "*For the First Time in History, Hip-Hop Has Surpassed Rock to Become the Most Popular Music Genre, According to Nielsen.*" Nielsen Holdings is a global measurement company who noted "a 72% increase in on-demand audio streaming" of the

Hip-hop genre. *USA Today* also released a similar article[46] around the same time. It is no secret that Rap and Hip-hop -as well as its newest embodiment *Trap*- are the most widely distributed musical genres whose rhythms can easily be found in the radio throughout the Greater Los Angeles region as well as in music videos that are promoted in YouTube, social media, and cable television.

In regards to why Ska bands are not better known, the *Emphatic Entertainment* interviewee organically answered the question in the context of Rap and Hip-hop. He mentioned that,

> "Ska doesn't get as big as Rap and Hip-hop... it just doesn't get that big. I mean, if you switched through the radio you're not gonna find a Ska station out here, you're not gonna find a reggae station, [but if you] try to look for something like Hip-hop and Rap you'll find like 20, one after the other, you know, Ska and Reggae, it's not mainstream stuff. It's more, I guess you could say it's more towards like the underground, like you've got to go on Youtube or go on SoundCloud to find it, or ReverbNation.. You can't find... [a] mainstream radio station that's going to play Ska and Reggae…"

In consideration that this case study focuses on Latinx Ska as a musical articulation that expresses a Latinx subaltern common sense in Los Angeles, such a context must be conceptualized as an arena where new generations of Latinxs have a relation to -and are heavily exposed to- the most distributed popular rhythms of the 21st century.[47] The co-optation of Rap and Hip-hop rhythms will be briefly explored in the following section -since it is the current manifestation of the most widely distributed co-opted genre- in order to reflect on the differences between what is currently co-opted and the avenues that exist for organic musical expressions that are not currently co-opted by structures of power.

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[46] *Rap Overtakes Rock as the Most Popular Genre among Music Fans. Here's Why*. USA Today.

[47] George Lipsitz writes in *Footsteps in the Dark* that the "most widely circulated cultural creations… reflect the ideas and values of the capitalists who sponsor them. They emphasize the emotions and ideas most valuable to marketers, privileging the needy narcissistic self of the consumer desire over the intersubjective and interactive social subject" (Lipsitz, 16).

XI. CO-OPTATION OF POPULAR RHYTHMS: LYRICAL REWRITES, SCENE CUTS, AND REVISIONS

Dick Hebdige provides insight on the struggle against the co-optation of sound when he writes that in the beginnings of Rap and Hip-hop, artists would record music from the radio, cut it up, and mix it on tape because "they wanted to undermine the system that had taken artists like James Brown from the ghetto and put them up there out of reach" (Hebdige, 141). Racially oppressed people from the Bronx gave birth to a new musical form of expression by reclaiming the sounds that were taken from the community.[48]

Tricia Rose also writes in her book *Black Noise* about the development of Rap and how Rap beats were created by sampling, looping, and distorting recorded sounds.[49] Angel referenced this musical trait when he mentioned that he loves Hip-hop because he likes "how music intertwines, how you could sample a jazz beat into a Hip-hop song…" The intertwining of sounds is a common method for the creation of popular music in contemporary times but it has historically struggled to exist since sampling contradicted the logic of capitalist privatization. Sampling and using technology to loop and distort rhythms - which is the basis for some of the most popular sounds of the 21st century- was at first an organic musical ingenuity from a subaltern community that needed to appropriate sound in order to interpret meaning in a new moment.

Rose goes on to write that the music industry often dilutes the political identity from music when an artist strives to further its exposure towards a wider public. One crucial

[48] George Lipsitz also goes on to write in *Footsteps in the Dark* that the "system sells back to people in diluted form products that symbolize the life that has been stolen from them. Yet this same process means that the mechanisms of domination suggest the sites of resistance" (Lipsitz, 261).

[49] Tricia Rose also writes in *Black Noise* that Rap "production involves a wide range of strategies for manipulating rhythm, bass frequencies, repetition, and musical breaks… these strategies for achieving desired sounds are not random stylistic effects, they are manifestations of approaches to time, motion, and repetition found in many New World black cultural expressions" (Rose, 80).

example of this is the music video; it is a powerful visual instrument where record companies have the power to change with scene cuts, word reversals, and lyrical rewrites (Rose, 14). Rose explains that to "refuse to participate in the manipulative process of gaining access to video, recording materials, and performing venues is to almost guarantee a negligible audience and marginal cultural impact" (Rose, 17). The music video is hence a powerful hegemonic instrument that visually manipulates the sonic realm[50] and which is influenced by structures of wealth and power. This is important when considering that new generations of Latinx communities in Los Angeles develop their consciousness in a region that is heavily influenced through the technological dissemination of popular music and towards assimilation to a dominant culture that maintains the power of an elite few.

In the interview with *Third Eye Productions,* the question about why Ska music is not better known prompted Kevin to discuss the differences between mainstream and underground artists. He mentioned that "what makes mainstream bands and underground bands different is the type of people you reach… but now what you gotta ask yourself is, how are you going to get your music into their ears, you know, how [are] you as an underground artist going to get your music to other people's hands." Kevin went on to speak about underground rappers and said that "they're underground because they don't want that label. They don't want to be a *sellout* but in reality, that label is going to get them heard by other people that have never heard them. You know that label is going to get their music into [people's] hands… that's how you make it." This response motivated me to ask what he

[50] Leslie Sklair also writes about visual manipulation and mentions that "nothing in human experience has prepared men, women and children for the modern television techniques of fixing human attention and creating the uncritical mood required to seek goods, many of which are marginal at best to human needs" (Sklair, 67).

meant by *sellout* since the term was previously brushed aside[51] and minutes later, the concept had become part of the collective analysis.

To my questioning of what a *sellout* was, Kevin responded by explaining that it means that "you're agreeing to the label's conditions to change your music based off of what they want, [what] they think that people want to hear. Instead of you playing your own music and you're playing what you want to play, the label's telling you no, we want you to be more Pop. So you start changing your music." This statement coincides with Tricia Rose's argument when she writes about the recording company's ability to revise music; it is common sense that these revisions happen. Yet Rose expands on this when she writes that "revisions do not take place in a political vacuum, they are played out on a cultural and commercial terrain that embraces.. [cultural] products and simultaneously denies their complexity and coherence" (Rose, 65); a complexity and coherence that arises from an artist's critical understanding of socio-political economic conditions. This revision process is the case for all musical forms[52] that transcend their grassroots context and permeate into structures of wealth, power, and distribution.

In a similar fashion, William I. Robinson writes about the revisions and delegitimization of political demands and how "those that serve to reproduce the social order (and thereby the long-term interests of the dominant groups) are legitimized in civil society

[51] The question about why Ska music is not more better known had previously prompted Angel to say, "I think the whole division with [the mainstream] is… they should be divided into like, I don't want to say the word *sell out*.." but he was then abruptly interrupted by the other two *Third Eye Productions* interviewees because they believed that it was problematic to perceive the mainstream in a negative manner and instead saw it as something to be achieved. After Angel's train of thought was brushed aside, I attempted to bring out his analysis by asking, "what is a sell out?" To which he replied, "that's the wrong word."

[52] The *Reggaetón* music genre is a perfect example of this process because it came from similar conditions to Ska, they both have families of resemblance to Jamaican Reggae, but Reggaetón became co-opted by the music industry. George Lipsitz mentions *Reggaetón* in Footsteps in the Dark and writes that "fused forms such as reggaetón and dancehall rap have emerged in the Caribbean in dialogue with hip hop and its relationship to interethnic coalitions and conflicts in North American cities" (Lipsitz, 29).

and filtered upwards to the state. Those that challenge the social order itself are delegitimized and filtered out of the very legitimizing parameters of that order" (Robinson, 71). This same process takes place within popular music since expressions that reinforce -or that do not challenge- the social order are perpetuated along to the most popular rhythmic fusions, while those that challenge the social order are often diluted and filtered out from the most popular -heavily distributed- rhythmic fusions of the moment.

XII. CENTRALIZED MEANS OF DISTRIBUTION

Tricia Rose goes on to elaborate on the centralized ownership of the means of distribution when she writes that,

> "the major labels developed a new strategy: buy the independent labels, allow them to function relatively autonomously, and provide them with the production resources and *access* to major retail distribution… The *six* majors reap the benefits of a genre that can be marketed with little up-front capital investment, and the artists are usually pleased to have access to the large record and CD chain stores that would otherwise never consider carrying their work" (Rose, 7).

While most of this statement holds true, a much more profound centralization over the means of distribution has taken place since the 2004 publication of Tricia Rose's book *Black Noise*. The consolidation of wealth and power has brought the number of major labels from six down to three, i.e. *Universal Music Group*, *Sony Music Entertainment*, and *Warner Music Group*. The previously mentioned -Long Beach Ska band- that became mainstream called *Sublime*, was signed to the *Music Corporation of America* which became *Universal Music Group* in 1996.[53] The *Universal Music Group* record label is owned by the French Corporation *Vivendi* who also own *Interscope Records,*[54] which is the record label that signed *No Doubt; No Doubt* being the other previously mentioned Ska band -from Anaheim

[53] *TIMELINE: NBC, Universal through the 20th Century and Beyond.* Reuters Staff. Web.
[54] *The Big Three Major Record Labels*. ThoughtCo. Web.

CA- that also became mainstream. This means that one global conglomerate of wealth and power ultimately owns the music from the two Ska bands from Southern California that made it to the mainstream.

Allen J Scott also writes about centralized ownership in his article *The US Recorded Music Industry: On the Relations Between Organization, Location, and Creativity in the Cultural Economy* where he writes that the music "majors are all represented by highly capitalized multinational firms whose interests typically extend across a diversity of media, consumer products and electronics sectors" (Scott, 1966). The fact that capitalists that are invested in -and who dominate- the recording music industry also dominate different sectors of the global economy ultimately demonstrates how the music industry is part of larger transnational conglomerates of wealth and power. The process of co-optation is hence a relation that popular musical rhythms have to a centralized control over the means of distribution. The co-optation of popular music -of the collective popular taste of civil society- in contemporary times exists within the cultural production dialectic of *transnational global capitalism*.[55]

While this holds true for co-opted musical genres, Angel mentioned in response to what is expressed along to Latinx Ska that "another aspect is that these bands also go really fucking political." This serves as a reminder that just as there are common sense notions of love for one's mother -or of Latinx "lifestyles" as articulated by Misa, - the complexity of the Latinx common sense is also embedded in a political reality where the Ska rhythmic space allows the articulation of authentic expressions that are not forced to detach from an organic political perspective. In contrast, the co-optation process alters both the subaltern rhythm as

[55] *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* by William I. Robinson.

well as the subaltern perspective and this process allows the most intricately developed rhythms of the 21st century to articulate the contradictions of dominant ideologies as common sense. The acknowledgement of this process helps us analyze how structures of power use music to influence the *structures of understanding*[56] in subaltern populations.

XIII. CONTRADICTORY CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE FORMATION OF A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Since dominant forces influence the ideological tension between subaltern authenticity and assimilation to a dominant culture, the concept of a *contradictory consciousness* must be explored. The formation of a contradictory consciousness means that Latinx Ska articulations are not just expressions of a collective subaltern common sense, but that they also -exist in relation to and can- express historic contradictory ideologies that perpetuate intra-class oppression.

An example of a contradictory consciousness can be heard from one of the most popular Ska bands of Southern California named *8 Kalacas*. Even though this band is from Orange County and does not play in the backyards of Los Angeles, they can be considered part of the more mainstream Latinx Ska bands of Southern California which people listen to -not just in live performances but- through the internet.[5758] *8 Kalacas* have a song titled *Dime*

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[56] Stuart Hall writes in *Encoding, Decoding* that "...effects, uses, gratifications - are themselves framed by *structures of understanding*, as well as being produced by social and economic relations, which shape their 'realization' at the reception end of the chain and which permit the meanings signified in the discourse to be transposed into practice or consciousness" (Hall, 93). The words and messages that are articulated to music reinforce a collective common sense. This dialogical process exists in what Hall refers to as the "class struggle of language" (Hall, 97).

[57] Tony did not mention 8 Kalacas but he did mention that he feels that there is a mainstream Ska, "but within our community." That mainstream Latinx Ska is "happening already… little by little… to where bands are already on Spotify and Pandora," meaning that people in the Ska cultural formation can listen to 8 Kalacas through the internet. More on internet and music in the second to last section titled *From the Subaltern to an Alternative Reality*..

[58] Some of the more mainstream Ska bands of Southern California also include *La Resistencia, South Central Skankers*, and *Viernes 13*. Bands that become more mainstream can most often be found in venues.

(Tell Me) that calls for armed revolutionary struggle, and in this song they ask their listeners to say -Tell Me- whether they would take up arms or not. They express a contradictory consciousness because they sing that one should not be a *Malinchista* but instead become a *Zapatista*[59] which perpetuates intra-class oppression by alluding to the conceptualization of an evil treacherous woman (*Malinchista)* as a contrast to their perception of positive forms of resistance (*Zapatistas*). By articulating this contrast they reinforce the demonization of the female body[60] and hence, unequal gender relations.[61]

This song also alludes to Che Guevara and to Emiliano Zapata which are portrayed as the leading examples of what resistance should look like for their transnational Latinx audience. By transnational audience I am referring to the large *8 Kalacas* fan base that exists in Southern California and Mexico,[62] hence making them a transnational ideological force.[63] The glorification of Latin American revolutionary leaders also serves to remind the historically oppressed about their own transformative presence. This means that even though songs from *8 Kalacas* express a contradictory consciousness,[64] they also bring light to an undeniable revolutionary fervor and to the symptoms of rebellion that organically arise from being the historically oppressed.

As a subaltern musical expression, Ska becomes an important lens of analysis *because* it is not the most co-opted genre but also because it cannot be separated from larger

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[59] The lyrics of *Dime* say "quédate en México no seas *Malinchista*, quédate en México hazte *Zapatista"* (Stay in Mexico don't be a *Malinchista*, stay in Mexico become a *Zapatista).*

[60] *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* by Silvia Federici.

[61] Assertions of machismo can also be heard in *Roncovacoco's* song, *Poco Hombre*.

[62] This transnationality is possible because of the popularity of Ska in Mexico and throughout Latin America. Latin American Ska bands can sometimes be found performing in the venues of Southern California. The spread of Ska in Latin America and its relation to Southern California is not explored in this thesis. This relation would be further explored if this thesis were to extend into the venue aspects of the scene. This relation is nevertheless important to consider when conceptualizing Latinx Ska as a transnational ideological force.

[63] At the moment when this part was first written in Spring 2018, 8 Kalacas had been touring in Mexico City (March 2), Los Angeles (March 11), Riverside (March 23), and Orange County (May 26).

[64] Through the reinforcement of sexism, homophobia, and machismo in their lyrics.

processes of ideological influence. While Ska had an era of co-optation with bands like *No Doubt* and *Sublime* obtaining radio play,[65] the genre has remained an influential rhythm for the subaltern experience after it was no longer profitable in terms of a wide mainstream appeal. This is a reminder that despite the attempt by structures of power to depoliticize the musical realm, a subaltern context provides the avenues for the organic articulation of a subalternity that cannot be separated from political conditions.

XIV. INFORMING THE REALITIES OF THE WORLD

La Resistencia for example begin their song *Resiste* (Resist) with a short shout out saying, "*Saludo a todas las bandas, que con su música informan la realidad del mundo. La Resistencia les saluda, desde Los Angeles California. Ska!*" (Greetings to all bands, who inform the realities of the world through their music. La Resistencia greets you, from Los Angeles California. Ska!)

Los Angeles Ska is a historic product of years of transnational hybridity that specifically alludes to the Latinx subaltern experience of contemporary times. In February 3, 2018 a Ska festival called *Los Angeles Ska Wars* took place in *Plaza de la Raza* and a Ska band named *Gabriela Penka* held up a sign[66] during their set with the written words, "*ICE Fuera de Nuestras Comunidades*" (ICE Out of our Communities). Their political statement demonstrates how the subaltern musical realm also serves as a stage to articulate a primary antagonism that the Latinx community currently faces. This festival was organized by the production called *Evoekore Media*[67] whose lead organizer is also the drummer for the band *La Resistencia.* In 2014 the singer for the band *La Resistencia* was deported to Mexico, yet

[65] I would argue that their sound relates more to the happy vibes forms of Ska rhythmic expression; which I would also most often correlate to white mainstream Ska bands.
[66] I did not witness this but I saw it on the social media platform *Instagram*.
[67] *Evoekore Media* and *Concrete Jungle Entertainment* are the leading productions that organize Ska performances in the venues of Southern California.

their next album *Sin Fronteras* was a response to this turn of events as the band's drummer flew to Mexico City to record with the singer.[68] *La Resistencia* was able to transcend through systemic contradictions and create a transnational dialogical exchange of ideas.

Another band named *Rebelión 68* can be found playing in the backyards of Los Angeles singing about the memories of a repressive history. Their song *Tres Culturas* for example has a happy sounding rhythm, yet the chorus repeats "*dos de Octubre no me olvido*" (2nd of October I don't forget) in order to describe throughout the song, and in much detail, the massacre that happened in 1968 at the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*[69] in Mexico City. Singing about and remembering the massacre is possible because the collective common sense in subaltern rhythmic spaces allow the articulation of a deeper history of oppression.

It is also interesting to bring up that a common political fervor[70] could be felt and heard throughout my fieldwork in the summer of 2017 as different Ska bands such as *The Ghetto on Fire* (Inland Empire), *The 5th Wave* (San Fernando Valley), and *Libertadores* (South East Los Angeles) would denounce the current government throughout their performances in South Central usually saying "Fuck -Donald- Trump!" When I asked the organizer of *Emphatic Entertainment* why he thinks people use the space to denounce the government he said, "I don't know. I guess just to.. we're all... Latinos here, you know, or in the community. So I feel like it's a way of like... just to make sure that everybody feels the way that you do." In other words, they are reinforcing their political common sense.

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[68] *Sin Fronteras: La Resistencia's Sonic Border Crossings and the Resurgent Politics of Diasporic Recognition*. Protest Vibes. Web.

[69] The main square within the Tlatelolco neighborhood of Mexico City.

[70] Here I allude to *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon where he writes about the colonies and their struggle to liberate themselves from colonial rule; that during revolutionary fervor, in the moments leading to armed struggle, culture changes very drastically as the essence of the people becomes intertwined with the revolutionary moment. Fanon wrote that "national culture is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong" (Fanon, 168).

XV. A SPOTLIGHT ON SPATIAL ENTITLEMENT

"Won't you look up and see, wondering what that mysterious light could be. What's that flashing in our eyes? It's the ghetto bird turning up in the sky!"

- The MidCarters

While the Latinx Ska scene is not created to be a political space, it must be contextualized as a political perspective because it is articulated from a community with a history of inequality, displacement, and with a policed existence. During the interview with Tony I recalled a moment that happened during my fieldwork where a Ska event that took place in his apartment complex -in Compton- was halted, and everyone was asked to gather (hide) at the back of the property and remain quiet. Tony mentioned that this happened because the police had come to the front of the property, and the conversation during the interview then developed towards a discussion about the tension that exists between the police and the community's attempt to create this musical space. Tony mentioned that "if the cops are patrolling around the street and they see that the street is empty and quiet, but they see a particular person out and about, like an activity, they're gonna go for that person."[71] The illegality of these spaces means that live Ska performances can be stopped by the police and they will also sometimes shine their police helicopter lights on the people dancing below.[72]

Tony's band *The Midcarters* have a song titled "*Ghetto Bird*" where in the chorus, the band and those around scream "*Fuck the Ghetto Bird!"* When I asked Tony why this song

[71] Robin D.G. Kelley writes in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* that virtually "every South Central resident has experienced routine stops, if not outright harassment, and thousands of African American and Latino youth [have] had their names and addresses logged in the LAPD anti gang task force data base" (Kelley, 184).

[72] I have witnessed the helicopter lights shining down on the skanking/dancing pits, but it can also be seen in the YouTube video from Third Eye Productions titled *Bill Skasby Playing MOTA live at Third Eye Pr*.

was created and what it meant, he said that at first the song was called "*The Raided Song"* which is alluding to how these non-venue Ska spaces are often suppressed and cancelled by the police. The songs name was then changed to "*Ghetto Bird"* which is in reference to the police helicopter. He went on to speak about living in Los Angeles, about being policed throughout his life, and that almost every night the police helicopter passes in his neighborhood. He also mentioned that he is against the way that the police abuse their power, about the trauma that his family has experienced throughout their different interactions with the police, and that he feels that it is unfair to go "through so much for the police to then ruin attempts to enjoy life." Tony concluded his explanation of the song by saying that he doesn't care about what the police "try to do to us, we're just here for a good time." His explanation of the song portrays life for Latinxs in South Central Los Angeles as a struggle for space and a struggle to assert oneself in a society where policing can promote a rejection of oneself.[73]

Gaye Theresa Johnson advances the concept of *spatial entitlement* -which perfectly portrays the prevalence of these policed musical spaces- and explains it as the "way in which marginalized communities have created new collectivities based not just upon eviction and exclusion from physical places, but also on new and imaginative uses of technology, creativity, and spaces" (Johnson, x). The imaginative use of technology[74] is seen with Los Angeles Latinx Ska because these spaces are often organized through social media as well as through organizational efforts where community relations are essential.

[73] Frantz Fanon wrote in *Wretched of the Earth* that "every effort is made to make the colonized confess the inferiority of their culture, now reduced to a set of instinctive responses, to acknowledge the unreality of their nation [or community] and, in the last extreme, to admit the disorganized, half-finished nature of their own biological makeup" (Fanon, 171).

[74] The "imaginative uses of technology" that Gaye Theresa Johnson writes about will be further explored in the second to last section titled *From the Subaltern to an Alternative Reality*.

XVI. STRATEGIZING AND ORGANIZING A NECESSARY MUSICAL ORGAN

In regards to finding a space for these non-venue Ska performances, Jonny who is the lead organizer for *Socal Syndicate*[75] -and who is from North Hollywood and of Guatemalan and Mexican background- described the community relations that take place when attempting to organize the Ska space. He mentioned that he is careful to give an appropriate price to property owners in order to create the possibility of using the space again in the near future.[76] As he reminisced on previous conversations he said, "I'm going to tell you straight up right now. I want to build up a partnership with you where I use your house and I'll tell all these other people, hey look, I can use this house... every two weeks we gotta wait and then we can do something."

Kevin also spoke about the organizational strategies they have used in the past in order to lessen the possibility of the police suppressing and cancelling their events. He recalled a moment where they had obtained a space but there were a lot of apartments in the area which meant that there was a higher probability that someone might call the police. Kevin recalled that they went around the apartments knocking on people's doors before the event, and that they not only made sure that they tried to talk to everybody, "but the people that we weren't able to talk to, we printed out a note saying what we were going to do, what time [it] was going to start, what time it was going to end. We put our contact information, [for in the case that there were] any issues, [they could] call us, not the cops… and we posted

[75] Socal Syndicate mentioned in his interview that he takes the bus from North Hollywood in order to organize shows throughout the Greater Los Angeles area.

[76] In the beginning of summer 2018 I attended a show that was stopped at around 12:00 am. A man went around telling people to leave and when I asked him if the police had come he said no. He mentioned that he had only been paid for the show until a certain time and that if we wanted to continue he did not have a problem if we paid him more. This was not a Socal Syndicate event but this circumstance reminded me of Jonny's comment.

it... [if] they didn't answer their door, we taped it and we put it on their door." These examples of organizational ingenuity are precisely the imaginative and creative use of spaces that Johnson writes about.

In regards to their drive to organize these musical spaces, Kevin also recalled that he went to shows in the past but that he felt that they were not good enough and that he saw how it could be done better. He said, "I did it for myself and for my friends, [I felt that] I could do it better, I could make sure…" In other words, Kevin understood the organizational work that was needed to improve the Ska space. Antonio Gramsci also theorizes about the importance of organizational work and writes that "the proletariat, at a certain moment of its development and history, recognizes that the complexity of its life lacks a necessary organ and it creates it, with its strength, with its good will, for its own ends" (Gramsci, 21) and that people create "class organizations in order to carry out their cultural activity" (Gramsci, 41). Just the same, the necessary leadership organically arises when Latinx youth feel the need to create and improve the Ska musical organ. It is a necessity to organize this specific form of class organization which is created by the working class -or soon to be working class- children of the Latin American diaspora.

It is also interesting to bring up that before the recorded interview began with the *Third Eye Productions* organizers, they asked who had already been interviewed and I mentioned that I had interviewed the *SoCal Syndicate* production. The *Third Eye Productions* organizers mentioned both the lead *SoCal Syndicate* organizer and Tony by their real names, and followed up by saying that they often promote, support, and attend each other's shows. This sense of unity and networking promotes a musical solidarity between

different Latinx communities throughout the Greater Los Angeles area and beyond;[77][78] and it is just as important to highlight that everybody that was interviewed mentioned that they do it for the people and for unity, and they also all agreed that organizing Ska events is not profitable. For example, Jonny of *SoCal Syndicate* said, "us as promoters, like we don't do it for the money. Me personally, I do it for the people… there's points that I pull out my hard working money.. [I have] pulled about 1,500 for one show to happen at White Oak." Angel also mentioned a similar perspective when he said,

> "I remember I was like 200 negative and I lost money, but everyone was happy. Everyone was happy that night. Everyone had a great night and was like... yeah I did lose $200, but at the end of the day it's like I'm going to get them back, which I did get them back and again everyone had a great night... and then it's something that like it kept me pushing, and at the end of the day it's like, as long as we have a good night, even if we're negative, a good night means that it's going to bring people back to the next night…"

The *Emphatic Entertainment* organizer also mentioned that there is no profit in organizing non-venue Ska events and said that "like 80 percent of the time we end up zeroing out." This organizational effort that unites the disenfranchised in a communal space, where unity is promoted and monetary gain is often disregarded, provides insight on the organizational power that exists within a marginalized community that attempts to transcend its systemic limitations.

[77] While a sense of unity exists, it is also true that solidarity is a complex concept, and like all forms of organizing, personal conflicts may arise that lead to some productions having problems with other productions. I asked for example, "Would you say that some productions have beef (problems) with each other?" and the answer was "That's a fact. Everybody knows that. A lot of people know that."

[78] Another crucial point that I came to realize in the final stages of writing this thesis is that the non-venue Ska space exists in relation to other backyard spaces such as Heavy Metal, Punk, and the Psychobilly genres. While there is solidarity between these different musical spaces, with a band or two of these other genres sometimes playing in the non-venue Ska space, people who prefer these less danceable more aggressive -*pit*- spaces sometimes perceive Ska in a negative light thus making my argument that Ska creates unity a bit more complex. I theorize that Ska's danceability is perceived negative by some because of preconceived notions of hardened masculinity that is more effectively displayed in other less danceable spaces.

XVII. SYSTEMIC IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE RACIALLY OPPRESSED

By systemic limitations I refer to a history of coercive forces that regulate and constantly police the musical-cultural existence of racially oppressed populations. Whether it is the repression of dance hall party spaces in the past, or of non-venue Ska spaces in contemporary times, marginalized communities continue to face structures of power that have used systemic coercion throughout a long history of discrimination in Los Angeles. One example being how "school funding based on property tax assessments in most localities give better opportunities to white children than to children from minority communities" (Johnson, 20). Los Angeles is ultimately a city built on segregation where the racially oppressed have been systematically impoverished both in an economic sense and through institutions of ideological formation (e.g. school funding).

Victor Hugo Viesca writes in his article *The Battle of Los Angeles: The Cultural Politics of Chicana/o Music in the Greater Eastside* about the systemic impoverishment of the racially oppressed and about how Los Angeles became a densely Mexican populated region in the 1960s and 1970s.[79] Viesca writes that an economic restructuring has brought forth massive unemployment, and that "the increasing profitability of the drug trade have made criminals out of many African American and Latino youth looking for a way to get paid. Los Angeles 'gangsta rap' and the 'narco-corridos' of the Mexican Banda music scene attest to these consequences" (Viesca, 225). It is also within this context that Latinx bands rose and who used -and continue to use- music as a way to express meaning from a

[79] He writes that due to the shutdown of local auto, tire, and steel industries in the Southeast and greater East Los Angeles region, there was a massive departure of the white population from the region which led to the consequent repopulation by working-class Mexicans who came because of the cheapened housing. The civil wars of the late 1970's and 1980's in Central America also contributed to the integration of Latinxs in the region and set the conditions for new Latinx populations to express the formation of new subaltern cultural formations.

contradictory socio-political position. This contradictory position arises from the economic restructuring of the *Neoliberal*[80] era that was implemented in the 1970's and which ultimately promoted a deepened exploitation of the already impoverished Latin American region. The displacement of Latinx populations from their Latin American homelands also set the conditions for new interpretations of Latinidad in new lands; interpretations that are embedded in political conditions that cannot be separated from a more profound history of oppression.

Yet it is through these conditions that Latinxs in Los Angeles articulate Ska and a sense of spatial entitlement where "everyday reclamations of space, assertions of social citizenship, and infra political struggles [create] the conditions for future successes in organized collective movements" (Johnson, x). Like Gramsci, Johnson highlights the potential of spaces that are organically created by the community because it helps to foresee organizational possibilities. Like Antonio Gramsci and Gaye Theresa Johnson, I also champion the potential that organic, grassroot, authentic spaces like Los Angeles Latinx Ska have in contemplating and creating alternative possibilities.

XVIII. FROM THE SUBALTERN TO AN ALTERNATIVE REALITY: CONTEMPLATING A LARGER STUDY

Jonny of *Socal Syndicate* also mentioned in regards to finding a space for non-venue Ska performances that they will often "do a post online" which is important since as previously mentioned, Gaye Theresa Johnson's concept of spatial entitlement also includes

[80] Neoliberalism is the most recent development of the capitalist system. We can "interpret neoliberalization either as a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elite" (Harvey, 19).

such imaginative uses of technology.[81] For this reason the access that racially oppressed populations have to a conglomerate of sounds -and hence to different formations of common sense- means that the internet, music apps, websites, and social media must all be taken into consideration. Acknowledging the relation between the internet and musical formations provides a deeper insight on how ideology is formed in relation to the technological musical realm of the 21st century.

For example, during the interviews when I asked why Ska was not mainstream or more widely heard, Tony replied that he feels that there is in fact a mainstream Ska, "but within our community." That mainstream Latinx Ska is "happening already… little by little… to where bands are already on Spotify and Pandora." In other words, to talk about the relation organic musical expressions have to a conglomerate of sounds is to acknowledge the role that the internet plays in this relation.

In the book *Consent of the Networked*, Rebecca Mackinnon mentions that the "... internet is a politically contested space" (Mackinnon, 5) where "search engines and social networks manipulate what we find and who we interact with on the Web" (Mackinnon, 10). She goes on to write about how structures of power and various "interest groups will use digital networks to obtain and maintain power whenever the opportunity presents itself" (Mackinnon, 14). All this is important when considering that massively distributed co-opted popular rhythms are manipulated to articulate the contradictions of dominant Neoliberal ideologies as common sense. While there exists organizing efforts that create and share

[81] After they have found a space, productions will post a flyer on social media with all the necessary information. The flyer involves the organizer's ability to use Photoshop or any other computer based art programs. When I asked Jonny about this he began by sharing his passion and relation to street art. The creation of these computer based flyers further reinforces Johnson's concept of "imaginative uses of technology."

subaltern common sense notions of a collective lived experience, these musical formations exist within the technological realm and hence, in relation to the interests of the powerful.

At the same time, while it is true that structures of power manipulate search engines in a way that promotes music that will serve for their benefit, it is just as important to acknowledge that the internet is a space that is open to the public where structures of wealth and power cannot entirely dominate. As Mark Poster writes in *CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere*; "the 'magic' of the Internet is that it is a technology that puts cultural acts, symbolizations in all forms, in the hands of all participants; it radically decentralizes the positions of speech, publishing, filmmaking, radio and television broadcasting, in short of the apparatuses of cultural production." Even though structures of power can manipulate search engines and thus increase the probability that their interests will be perpetuated does not negate the fact that there will be alternative options.

Clay Shirky also reminds us in his article *The Political Power of Social Media* that mass media alone does "not change people's minds; instead, there is a two-step process. Opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues. It is in this second, social step that political opinions are formed" (Shirky, 5). To expand on this argument, this second social step also takes place through the reinforcement of a collective common sense within organic musical spaces.

While this thesis explores a musical space that is not implicitly political, social media has ultimately become a coordinating tool not only for the organization of subaltern musical spaces, but also "for nearly all of the world's political movements" (Shirky, 2). This means that by relating to social media they are relating to a politically contested space. It would therefore also be interesting to expand on how political movements in Los Angeles are using

the music of the people to mobilize the community; a mobilization that becomes everyday more intertwined with social media. For example, there is already Ska and Hip-hop expressions in grassroot organizations such as in the *Indigenous People's Revolution* (IPR) which is an organization that uses art as a tool for consciousness in South Central, as well as different variations of Rock/Punk/Ska musical expressions in *Defend Boyle Heights* counter-gentrification events in East Los Angeles; both of which I found on the social media platform, Instagram.[82]

It is nevertheless important to analyze organic musical spaces that are not implicitly political because they provide a unique lens from which to study the musical realm -and the dialogical process that exists- in what Stuart Hall refers to as "the class struggle in and over culture" (Hall, 484). George Lipsitz also writes that the enduring power of social struggles and social movements exist within musical expressions "even when those movements themselves are no longer around" (Lipsitz, 142). This rings true for Los Angeles Ska because of the systemic exploitation that has taken place towards the racially oppressed populations that originally created the music as well as towards Latinxs who perform the music in contemporary times. The subaltern rhythms that are drawn upon, along with the articulation of a subaltern lived experience,[83] exists in relation to a historic struggle for liberation from oppressive forces, and the contradictory consciousness that is articulated to these subaltern rhythms expresses the antagonisms that must be analyzed and overcome throughout the different stages of our collective attempt to achieve a more egalitarian society.

[82] Through social media (Facebook) I also found out about the *Annual Mexica New Year Los Angeles Festival* which takes place in Boyle Heights Mariachi Plaza and where "contemporary native Mexican and urban musical performances that have come out of the Barrios of Los Angeles" celebrate all First Nation Indigenous people. Such an event would also be an interesting place to expand this study since it is a space where Latinx Ska converges with other cultural subalternities.

[83] It would also be interesting to explore how gentrification is affecting the organic articulation of a Latinx subaltern experience. More on this in the final section.

To further this analysis, it would also be interesting to consider other musical formations that are organically articulated by the racially oppressed populations of Los Angeles in order to examine any congruence -or preferences- in how marginalized populations access and perform music. Most importantly, it would be interesting to explore whether there are similarities in the discourse of different musical expressions from the racially oppressed populations of Los Angeles, and whether the discourse of different organic musical formations perpetuate similar forms of intra-class oppression.[84]

Finally, in a deeper study of the effects that rhythmic co-optation has on marginalized communities and the relation subaltern musical expressions have to a conglomerate of sounds, it would be relevant to explore people's perceptions of mainstream artists whose lyrics derive away from a Neoliberal hegemonic discourse. For example through poetic subtlety rappers such as *J Cole, Kendrick Lamar,*[85] and *Residente*[86] often challenge Neoliberal notions; and the visual poetry in *Childish Gambino's* 2018 music video *This is America* also provides an interesting dynamic to the struggle for hegemony. These examples are also a reminder that the subaltern common sense of an artist can exist even within the realm of co-optation.

[84] In other words, do musicians who perform their own versions/manifestations of a massively co-opted genre of music -e.g. Hip-hop, Rap- within a subaltern context express a *common sense* that is similar or different to those from subaltern Latinx Ska expressions?

[85] When asked if he liked any radio music, the organizer of *Emphatic Entertainment* mentioned J Cole and Kendrick Lamar.

[86] *Residente* if from the popular Puerto Rican band named *Calle 13.*

XIX. ALTERNATIVE CONTRADICTIONS: GENTRIFICATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION

"*Music is a spiritual thing of its own. You can hypnotize people with music and when you get them at the weakest point, you preach into the subconscious what you want to say*."

- Jimi Hendrix

This final section is named *Alternative Contradictions* in order to highlight the contradictions that are faced during any attempt to incorporate subaltern musical expressions towards liberation. In order to contemplate on the possibility of using music to create an alternative reality, I will now reference Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth,* and two writings from George Lipsitz;[87] his article *The Struggle for Hegemony* and his book *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*. Finally, *gentrification*[88] will also be briefly mentioned as a leading example of an oppressive force that Latinx musical expressions in Los Angeles face.

George Lipsitz writes in his article *The Struggle for Hegemony* that Antonio Gramsci "championed a political and ideological struggle *for* hegemony, [and that] he called for '*a war of position*' in which aggrieved populations *seek* to undermine the legitimacy of dominant ideology, rather than just a 'war of maneuver' aimed at seizing state power" (Lipsitz, 146). The act of seeking, of actively -and consciously- attempting to undermine the legitimacy of the dominant -through musical expressions that lead to conscious, practical,

[87] With whom I took a Directed Reading course with at the University of California Santa Barbara in the fall quarter of 2017.

[88] Google search defines gentrification as "the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste" yet through this process, property owners consequently raise rent prices thus allowing wealthier -mainly white- populations to come in and displace racially oppressed communities that can no longer afford to pay rent; communities that populated the region since the "white flight" era that was previously mentioned in the footnotes.

and/or dialogical action-[89] is what ultimately relates the arguments in this thesis towards a practical engagement that strives for an alternative reality. While seizing state power comes with its contradictions since it has mostly served structures of wealth and power, the struggle for hegemony transcends state structures and also manifests in the cultural terrain. Musical expressions are hence part of what Gramsci refers to as the "trench-systems of modern warfare" (Gramsci, 18) since it is part of the ideological warfare in the struggle for hegemony.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon writes about the colonies and their struggle to liberate themselves from colonial rule; that during revolutionary fervor, in the moments leading to armed struggle, culture changes drastically as the essence -the arts and song- of the people become intertwined with the revolutionary moment.[90] Fanon wrote that "the existence of a nation is not produced by culture, but in the people's struggle against the forces of occupation" (Fanon, 159). Translating the struggle for liberation from colonial powers, to the potential that racially oppressed cultural formations have in struggling against coercive state structures ultimately renders musical expressions as inseparable from the developments in the current political moment. This also means that by adopting, transforming, and rearticulating music into new dialogues that challenge the social order, Latinxs in Los Angeles express a consciousness that is -and has been- affected by the deepening antagonisms of the capitalist system.

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[89] Manning Marable writes in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* that "a long and painful ideological struggle must be mounted by progressives to create a 'counter-hegemony' essential for socialism. [And that] every aspect of the capitalist civil-society -educational institutions, the church, the media, social and cultural organizations- must be undermined. This 'war of position,' to use Antonio Gramsci's concept, must be viewed as the development of a popular 'historical bloc,' or revolutionary social bloc' which is comprised of all progressive forces of divergent class and racial groups" (Marable, 229). Organic musical spaces like the Latinx Ska scene in Los Angeles give insight on what is needed to create a popular historic bloc since it is a "divergent class formation."

[90] I would go as far to argue that the symptoms of this grander process could be seen and felt throughout my fieldwork.

As George Lipsitz writes in his book *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, "social identities and social relations not yet possible in political life often appear first within popular culture.. important evidence about the world that is emerging all around us can be discerned in the ways in which popular music.. [registers] changes in black and Latino identities" (Lipsitz, 140). For these reasons it is important to conclude this thesis by reiterating that Latinx Ska articulations are not just expressions of collective assertion, or of the possible construction of an ideological war of position that could develop more deeply in a *crisis*,[9192] but that it also expresses historic contradictory ideologies that can perpetuate oppression while it is at the same time attempting to articulate liberation.

This thesis provides a socio-political context to the Los Angeles Latinx Ska space in an attempt to shine light on the authenticity and the contradictions that are articulated in the Latinx subaltern common sense. This sets the foundation to then demonstrate how the co-optation of popular rhythms is a process where structures of power attempt to obliterate

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[91] William Robinson –with whom I took various undergrad and graduate courses with at the University of California Santa Barbara- writes in his latest book, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*, that capitalism goes through regular *cyclical crises* about once a decade and that the crisis of 2008 -with the global financial collapse- was

> "a deeper *structural crisis*, such as we faced in the 1970s, and before that in the 1930s, meaning that the system can no longer continue to function in the way that it is structured… in such a conjuncture the structural crisis has the potential to become *systemic*, depending on how social agents respond to the crisis and on the unpredictable element of contingency that always plays some role in historical outcomes. A systemic crisis is one in which only a change in the system itself will resolve the crisis" (Robinson, 16).

Any type of crisis is going to deeply affect marginalized communities since a crisis often leads to more wealth being extracted from labor and to more cuts being made to social services/reproduction. The deepening exploitation of marginalized communities during a crisis means that there is a higher possibility of repression and resistance. This profound extraction of wealth can erupt into social revolt as well as into state repression which is seen with the heightening of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids within undocumented communities. It is important to point this out because throughout history music has served to create a sense of solidarity that uplifts the spirits of the oppressed during different depths such of crises.

[92] Stuart Hall also writes in his essay *Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity*, that crises exist between moments of stability and moments of change and that it is important to study their "intervals" in order to conceptualize the relation "between the development of organic movement and conjunctural movement in the structure" (Hall, 14). It is in the intervals between crises that civil society creates the organic formations that can develop to a deeper extent during a crisis since these forms of organization are a fundamental response to developments in the structure.

ideological formations that can critically analyze a subaltern context. Critical analyses in musical expressions are often diluted by structures of power because they open the possibility for a common sense that calls for a radical struggle for liberation from oppressive forces.

While oppressive forces can be conceptualized in its many forms, the threat of *gentrification* is worth mentioning in this conclusion because of the challenges that this process of displacement possesses on organic Latinx musical expressions in Los Angeles. In other words, while Los Angeles musical culture and the Ska genre have been arenas that have challenged preconceived racial notions,[93] the increasing integration of white perspectives within Latinx Ska bands hints at the possibility that the process of displacement is already taking place; a displacement that will alter the organic musical articulations of Latinx subalternity. We are still to see to what extent gentrification will change Los Angeles Ska and whether the transcendental musical realm will serve to facilitate or to challenge[94] the displacement of the racially oppressed.

The transcendental nature of music is undeniable, and because of this I argue throughout this thesis that the power within this transcendence also creates the potential to align ideological, dialogical, and practical aspects of lived expression towards a transformation of social conditions. By also conceptualizing the struggle to conquer popular culture through the co-optation of popular rhythms, the struggle for hegemony can be

[93] The checkered pattern that now serves as a symbol for the rude girl/boy Ska culture originated during the Two-Tone second wave Ska development as a way to denounce racism and promote a racially integrated musical culture.

[94] George Lipsitz writes in *Footsteps in the Dark* that Sun Ra -a jazz musician- said that "Musicians often play wonderful things, bring together wonderful sounds, but it doesn't mean a thing. Not for themselves, not for other people. Everyone says that's wonderful, that's the work of a great musician. Of course, that's true, but what's the significance of it? People don't get better because of the music even though they certainly need help. I believe that every artist should realize that. That his work has no meaning whatsoever unless he helps people with it" (Lipsitz, 92).

conceptualized as a dialectic of transnational proportions. This is a dialectic where organic musical expressions in *global cities*[95] like Los Angeles cannot be separated from larger processes of transnational capitalist accumulation. The extraction of popular rhythms from the community along with the centralized means to distribute popular music must be conceptualized as the inner workings of a *transnational capitalist hegemony*[96] where transnational conglomerates of wealth and power suppress[97] the political identity of popular rhythms hence distorting the possibility of a radical systemic understanding within marginalized communities. Analyzing this dialogical and ideological dynamic -of words said to song in an organic space but in relation to co-opted perspectives-, reveals the dialectical contestation that exists in the musical realm as the most massively distributed popular rhythmic fusions of the 21st century articulate the contradictions of Neoliberalism as

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[95] Saskia Sassen writes that "the growth of networked cross-border dynamics among global cities includes a broad range of domains… [and we] see greater cross-border networks for cultural purposes" (Sassen, 29).

[96] William I. Robinson writes in *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* that the rooting of polyarchies all over the world was an attempt by structures of power "to develop a transnational Gramscian hegemony in emerging global society" (Robinson, 72). He goes on to write that what "was taking place at a structural level was the transition to the global economy, the emergence of transnational capital as the hegemonic fraction of capital on a world scale, and the dissolution of an international system whose stability had rested on competing nation-states with a dominant center (a "hegemon")" (Robinson, 74).

[97] The struggle for hegemony that takes place with the suppression of lyrical content does not solely come from transnational conglomerates of power but also at the national level. In *Footsteps in the Dark* for example, George Lipsitz writes that in 1994,

> "Black youths across the United States encountered a whole lot of folly from an unexpected source, from some members of the Black Congressional Caucus. At a time of severe unemployment, systematic housing discrimination, educational inequality, and rampant police brutality, these representatives launched an inquiry into the lyrics of rap music. They responded to overwhelming structural problems in society with a moral panic-a publicity campaign designated to portray people *with* problems *as* problems. Moral panics about popular music have a long and dishonorable history. Adult anxiety about the behavior and values of young people has often led to attempts to blame the music young people like for disturbing cultural changes" (Lipsitz, 156).

At the same time, those who defended Rap music claimed that

> "the critics were blaming the messengers for news they did not wish to face, that gangster rap reported, recorded, and registered social changes that young people had seen with their own eyes, that gangsta rap was one of the few sites in U.S. society capable of telling the truth about the devastation caused by deindustrialization and disinvestment in inner-city communities, about the effects of economic restructuring, the failure to enforce civil right laws, the pervasiveness of police brutality, and the evisceration of the social wage caused by tax cuts and shifts in government spending away from social services and toward military procurement" (Lipsitz, 157).

common sense, the politics of co-optation reaffirm the struggle for transnational capitalist hegemony, and subaltern musical articulations provide contradictory visions that are crucial to conceptualize in the attempt to create a society that uses music to liberate the racially oppressed from oppressive forces.

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